



471 JPL Wick Drive
PO Box 4538
Harrisburg, PA 17111

OFFICE 717.236.8570
FAX 717.236.8671
WEB www.familydesign.org

March 12, 2013

RE: Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care Hearing, Feb. 27, 2013

Dear Honorable Members of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources:

As an adoption professional for twenty years, an adoptive parent and member of the Voice for Adoption (VFA), I would like to comment on the Increasing Adoptions hearing and provide feedback.

It was a pleasure to review the testimony provided on 2/27/13 by Nicole Dobbins, Executive Director of VFA. Her information resonated in so many ways with what we either experienced here in Pennsylvania or would anticipate as more and older children are adopted.

I have been a part of Pennsylvania's public private collaborative since 1995 and I have seen the progression of first increasing adoptions of children who were in care many years – then increasing adoptions for sibling groups, and then focusing on the older youth adoptions. All of those of course speak to the importance of federal programs such as the Adoption Incentive program and Title IV-E Adoption Assistance. These federal initiatives have increased the focus on the importance of providing permanency through adoption to children who are waiting in foster care.

Adoptive families experience ongoing challenges. States should be obligated to support the newly formed family to provide for their additional children and the emotional and behavioral challenges they bring. Those challenges can come either from their history of neglect or abuse, their multiple moves in care, prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol, or other health or emotional issues, and then adding all of that to the unique and caring family who adopts. Over the years of looking for the right families, setting up post adoption and post permanency services that meet the needs of the families, and delivering services to increase the likelihood of older youth being placed and adopted, it became apparent that adoption assistance was one of the barriers to placement when not being implemented in a standard and straight forward manner – once addressed (through federal leadership) many more youth found placements and were adopted. Likewise, once post adoption services were offered and delivered and we were able to get feedback on the services, it became apparent that a family's just knowing they would have a safety net or support system, or someone to talk to who would understand their family's situation is a very important factor in caregivers deciding to take the final step to adopt. This makes post-adoption services just as critical as adoption awareness and promotion. The federal government should place a greater emphasis on establishing post-adoption support in every state.

The federal government has committed to the importance of finding adoptive homes for so many children over the past 10+ years, the commitment to solidify those families by funding on-going services post-adoption is the right thing to do - especially when we are looking at the continued high numbers of youth “aging out” of the system without permanent connections and to unfortunate outcomes. There are more families to find, develop and connect to those youth. Committing to funding to support those families for several years after the adoption is a sound investment. Two services research tells us are important to families agrees with what we find in Pa, those are support groups for the adoptive parents and when possible for the children, and respite care which allows families a brief break with someone who knows and cares about their child or children. Respite provided properly removes the added trauma of exposing them to new and unfamiliar caregivers.

Not every family will need such services – but for many just knowing that these services are available is what can assist the prospective families in making the lifelong commitment to adopting a child from foster care. The importance of increasing adoptions has been an important federal initiative. I believe it is just as important – and can lead to increased adoptions – that the federal take a greater leadership role in ensuring post-adoption services are available in every state, and (in light of the expansion of permanent legal custody) even post-permanency services are available in every state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda Lawrence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brenda Lawrence,
Executive Director

supporting the public-private partnership in PA, known as the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network.